

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

Frequently Asked Questions

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* and MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus is a type of bacteria (germ) that can be commonly found on human skin, and is sometimes referred to as “golden staph”. Most of the time, it lives in our nose or on our skin without causing any problems. However, under some circumstances, it can enter the body through broken skin (for example through wounds, surgery, or intravenous drips) and cause infection that requires treatment with antibiotics. Some strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* have developed resistance to the usual antibiotics used for treatment of infections and these are known as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). Infections caused by MRSA are usually more difficult to treat due to the reduced number of effective antibiotics available.

How did I get MRSA?

Some people have MRSA in their nose or on their skin with no apparent ill effects. This is called colonisation. People colonised with MRSA who show no signs or symptoms of illness are known as carriers. However, if the MRSA enters a wound or broken skin, it can cause an infection. MRSA infections that occur in the community usually appear as skin infections, such as pimples and boils, and may occur in otherwise healthy people who have not been in hospital. Some infections may require treatment in hospital.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is usually spread from person to person through direct contact (usually via your hands) with a person who is infected or colonised, or by contact with contaminated shared items such as towels and frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, taps and benches. It is therefore important that people who are known to have MRSA are placed under special precautions whilst in hospital in order to prevent spread to other patients.

What does it mean to have MRSA?

People may not know that they are carrying MRSA and may never develop an infection. However, if people who are colonised with MRSA have an operation or a medical device inserted such as an intravenous drip or wound drain, they become at risk of getting an infection. Treatment choices are then limited because of the resistance to antibiotics usually used to treat the infection.

What happens when I am in hospital?

If you are scheduled for certain operations such as a hip or knee replacement, major heart or vascular surgery, then specimens will be required for laboratory testing to determine whether you are a carrier. This will involve taking a swab from your nose, groin or axilla (arm-pit) and any wounds or indwelling medical devices, such as a urinary or intravenous catheter.

If you are found to have MRSA you may be cared for in a single room and health care staff will wear gloves and a gown when caring for you. You will be asked to regularly wash your hands with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand rub, and to stay in your room whenever possible unless you need to be transferred for special tests or treatment. Hospital staff will advise you if different instructions are necessary.

What about family and visitors when I am in hospital?

It is quite safe for family and friends to visit you whilst in hospital. However, visitors are strongly advised to wash their hands after visiting you, and if they have any wounds they should be covered. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent the spread of MRSA (and other infectious diseases such as the flu and gastro).

If visitors or family help you with care such as assistance with dressing or showering then they may be asked to wear gloves and a gown.

How can I prevent the spread of MRSA when I go home?

To prevent the spread of MRSA to other people when you are at home, it is important that you follow these precautions:

- > Wash your hands with soap and water and dry thoroughly after going to the toilet or before preparing food.
- > Keep wounds, cuts and abrasions clean and covered until healed.
- > Keep surfaces such as benchtops, bathrooms and toilets clean.
- > Use your own towels and face cloths. Do not share these items with other people.
- > Avoid sharing grooming items e.g. nail scissors, tweezers, razors and toothbrushes.
- > If you are in a sporting team it is advisable not to share towels or drink bottles with team mates.
- > Make sure you follow instructions and advice provided by your doctor or healthcare provider on how to care for wounds or manage medical devices.

No special requirements are needed for your clothing and towels, eating utensils and dishes. They can be washed in the normal way using detergent or laundry powder. Extra disinfectant is not needed.

You do not have to tell anyone (other than health professionals) of your MRSA status.

What should I do if I have to go into hospital or receive health care in the community?

You should always inform the health care worker that you have had a MRSA infection or colonisation in the past. This will assist them to ensure that they provide the appropriate care for you. This may mean being allocated a single room, having some swabs taken to see if you still have MRSA, and you may also be asked to use a special soap and nasal ointment for a few days prior to any surgery.

Where can I find more information on MRSA?

You can speak with your Doctor or Health Professional or access more information from the following SA Health web pages:

- > Infection prevention and control: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/hospitalinfections
- > "You've Got What?": www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat

For more information

Infection Control Service
Communicable Disease Control Branch
11 Hindmarsh Square
Adelaide SA 5000
Telephone: 1300 232 272
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

Public -I1-A2



*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group



www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons



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